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September 4, 2013

Congressman Doc Hastings, Chairman  
Natural Resources Committee  
United States House, Washington DC

Congressman Peter DeFazio, Ranking Member  
Natural Resources Committee  
United States House, Washington DC

Dear Chairman Hastings and Ranking Member DeFazio;

The State of Colorado and much of the western United States has been hit with severe drought conditions for several years. This, coupled with areas of extensive insect infestation and thick stands of forest overgrowth, has created an environment ripe for intense wild fire. In fact, the summer of 2013 saw one of the worst fire seasons in recent memory. Hinsdale County had one of the largest wildfires in its known history, the Papoose Fire (part of the Westfork Fire Complex, which burned nearly 110,000 acres in Mineral, Rio Grande and Hinsdale Counties). The Hinsdale County Board of Commissioners supports proactive measures to address forest health. We also support measures to mitigate the dangers that intense wild fires pose to human safety, property, infrastructure, wildlife habitat, and water and air quality. HR 1526, Restoring Healthy Forests for Healthy Communities Act of 2013, contains provisions that we believe take much needed steps to address these issues, as well as providing family wage jobs that result from a healthy forest products industry.

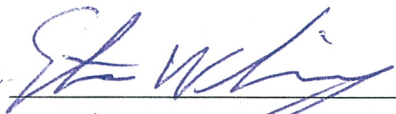
As a county comprised of 96.5% public land, in addition to being heavily forested, we in Hinsdale County are reminded daily of the sad condition of our forests. From our perspective, there are at least three recurring themes hindering forest management. First is the issue of funding to prepare sales; second is the environmental analysis and review time for management activities; and third is the costly litigation that inevitably stalls or totally stops much of the harvest that badly needs to be done.

HR 1526 provides a common sense approach for a return to forest management practices that actually lead to good forest health. We appreciate and strongly support the temporary extension of the Secure and Rural Schools and Community Self Determination Act that will facilitate the transition to long term solutions. SRS funds are critical to the operation of both our Road and Bridge Department and our local School. The two-year authorization will help give confidence to the forest products industry as they develop long term business plans that will ultimately provide the funding for jobs, taking the burden and expense from the USFS to the private industry where it belongs.

We respectfully request your full support for HR 1526 and its Senate counterpart. We urge you to take whatever steps you can to promote forest health and conserve the quality of our beautiful landscape for present and future generations, and provide for the urgent needs of our community.

Hinsdale Board of County Commissioners

  
Cindy Dozier, Chair

  
Stan Whinnery, Commissioner

  
Susan Thompson, Commissioner

CC: Senator Michael Bennet; Senator Mark Udall; Congressman Scott Tipton